

THE CAUSES BEHIND MEXICO'S REVOLUTION.

Gilbert Reid.



## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In the minds of most Americans the prominent question concerning the policy of our government in Mexico has been whether General Huerta should or should not have been recognized as Provisional President. With substantial unanimity Americans residing in Mexico were in favor of it and so were a large section of the people at home. That course seemed to offer the best prospect of restoring order. This would have to be done by the Diaz method, but that seemed to be the only one available, since real self-government appeared to be impossible and a dictatorship under the form of a sham republic appeared to be the only alternative to anarchy. "Mexico has exchanged Diaz for chaos," was the general verdict; and the inference was that the chaos should now be exchanged for the best available substitute for Diaz.

This view is reasonable if one looks for nothing more than the immediate restoration of order. To banish Huerta and declare a republic would soon mean anarchy again unless one fundamental condition were changed. That underlying condition is the ownership of land. A republic that will endure cannot be made out of serfs nor of ex-serfs driven to brigandage. Peasants with small holdings of their own are admirable material to make it of since they will have no motive for taking to a roving and plundering life; but so long as they are without resource except plunder

even the sternest military rule would have a precarious tenure of power. Leaders would arise and call followers enough about them to keep the greater part of the country in anarchy. As Mr. Reid's article shows, a *sine qua non* of peace is the creation of a land-owning peasantry. The freer the government that is proposed, the more obviously necessary is the existence of a great body of citizens personally free and interested in civil order.

Mexico is meeting the problem which France met at the time of the Revolution, Germany shortly afterwards and Ireland and the Philippine Islands in our own day. It was solved in one way in France and in a very different way in the other countries. France freed her peasants and secured land for them in violent fashion, by directly seizing the lands of the "aristocrats." Germany did it by the reforms of Stein and Hardenburg, which took due account of the rights of proprietors and yet created the body of independent peasants which is the source of the greatest strength of that country. While most French proprietors were in banishment and while the guillotine was doing its work with those who remained, the revolutionary government made free with the property of all of them, and the question is whether the like of this will happen in Mexico. It is a natural inference that, if the Constitutionalists get full possession of the country, what they have done in parts of it will be done everywhere. Bold confiscation is the simplest process for getting farms for the peons. Seize the great estates, give each man sixty-two and a half acres and make it inalienable for ten years, and the thing is done. It will not be

as completely done in Mexico as it was in France and Germany. Making citizens of Indians and half breeds presents a knottier problem than making them of European peasants, and sweeping and indiscriminate confiscation makes a sorry beginning of any policy looking toward internal peace. Will that take place if the Constitutionalists win? Mr. Reid implies that it will if this party has its way; but he tells us that an army of the United States, if once in Mexico City would stop it. America and the European powers stand, as he thinks, for dollars rather than for men and will be likely, if the case rests with them, to create a new dictatorship a little more respectable than the present one without emancipating the people. Yet it will want before all else stability, and a dictatorship with a discontented and rebellious people cannot be stable. The inference is clear that, if our army goes to Mexico—which may the guardian powers of both countries forbid—it can carry out its purpose only by solving the land problem, emancipating the peons and creating a basis for the stable government it desires.

Free lands are what the American people will demand for Mexico. Mere order and the resumption of industry would, indeed, do much for the peons. The vast capital that has been invested in the country has had its effect in raising the wages of labor and, with renewed security, would have a greater effect hereafter. If supplemented by land holdings, such a wide demand for labor would go far toward making peons independent and contented. There is, therefore, no inconsistency in protecting property and freeing men at the same time. A government strong enough to re-

press disorder will be strong enough to do for its peasantry what Stein did for the peasantry of Prussia—give them land and make them prosperous without despoiling other classes of property that is rightfully theirs. It is not necessary to choose between a rule of blood and iron, on the one hand, and a Devil's sabbath of confiscation, banishment and massacre, on the other. If the United States shall justify its action in Mexico, it must be by helping the country to avoid both of these ruinous extremes. It must help to make government stable, property secure and peasants comfortable. The small farms which Villa and Zapata have promised to their followers, if secured by a fairer process than they have thus far used, will afford the means of doing it.

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Columbia University, May 12, 1914

# THE CAUSES BEHIND MEXICO'S REVOLUTION

And What May Be the Effect of an American Occupation Upon Her Future

## THE PEON'S ASPIRATIONS

How He Is Working Them Out in His Own Way—John Reid's Analysis  
of the Internal Situation

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*To the Editor of The New York Times:*

The newspapers have managed to present pretty accurately what happened and where in the Mexican revolution. But they have not bothered with why.

James Creelman has told us that Huerta is a drunkard; he never told us that Huerta was one of the most efficient field commanders the Federal army ever had. We have been told all about Villa's once being a bandit—as if that had anything to do with the way he has done his job as a General and a Governor. The correspondents have spoken of the Madero revolution, the Orozco revolution, the Carranza revolution, and the Zapata revolution; but there is and has been only one revolution in Mexico. It is very necessary at this time that the American people should know what the revolution is about.

It was at first purely and simply a fight for land. During the last twenty years of the Porfirio Diaz

régime the landed aristocracy of Mexico, created originally by the Spanish land grants, slowly and definitely absorbed the open cattle ranges, the communal fields around the towns, the village commons, and, lastly, the small independent farms that had been held sometimes by one family for three generations. Then the big haciendados banded together and secured the passage of the Land Law of 1896, which permitted the denunciation of all property in the republic not secured by a legal title. Since most of the small holdings were occupied by illiterate peons, too ignorant to know anything about titles, and since in many cases their occupancy of the land had been undisturbed for generations, great tracts of fertile country passed into the hands of the haciendados. And for the tenants evicted by the aid of Federal soldiers there was no alternative but to become slaves on great estates and no hope for the future.

#### PEONS AT LOWEST LEVEL

The subjugation of the peons to the level of draft horses was deliberate. Often 500 to 1,000 families did the work of one hacienda, and everything was done to keep them in submission, physical contentment and ignorance. Even public schools could not be established on the hacienda because it was "private property."

But land discontent among the peons had been smoldering since the Spanish crown gave Cortez a province for a garden. The evicted farmers and the debauched and enslaved Indians—notably the Yaquis,



whose case is the most tragic and shameful in the history of Mexico—could still remember with passionate longing the time when their fathers owned each his little ranch. Even the hacendados recognized that instinct of the peons, and allotted a tiny private field to each one which he was allowed to work on Sundays. The rest of the week he rose at dawn and worked the immense farms of his employer until late at night. Sundays he rested by furiously working his own patch, and there were produced the best crops of the hacienda. Remember that the Mexicans are naturally a peaceful agricultural people and only take to banditry as a second choice.

There is a flood of books abroad in the land, of which Mr. Hamilton Fyfe's "The Real Mexico"—or, better, "Mexico According to *The London Times*"—is the best example. They tell you that the revolution is a revolution of the middle class because it was stirred up by Francisco Madero. That is simply a lie. In the first place there is no Mexican middle class. In the second place, the entire unrest of the peons had been described and predicted ten years before the revolution broke out.

#### START OF THE REVOLUTION

It was and is nothing but a revolution of the peons. And the first man who proposed any plan, no matter how inadequate, to remedy the land question was followed. Zapata rose in arms a year before Madero did, demanding confiscation and distribution of the great estates among the peons and political autonomy for two great States. Madero's proclamation to the

Mexican people from prison at San Luis Potosi inflamed the peons only because he promised to acquire the big land monopolies and reapportion them among the poor. But when his Government was established in Mexico City, either he became conservative, or, because of political pressure, he was unable to carry out his plans, or the time was too short; anyway, the situation remained the same, and the peons became discontented.

First, Zapata abandoned him and raised the standard of "War for the Land"; then Orozco issued the plan of Tacubaya, in which he promised the peons free farms. In the twinkling of an eye the turbulent North rose in arms, but Orozco betrayed the peons. He had been bribed by the big landowners to embarrass Madero, whom they feared, and never intended to settle the land question at all. When the peons learned that, they abandoned his red flag by thousands and returned, hopeless and disheartened, to their homes. Zapata, who had acknowledged Orozco as President of Mexico, renounced him. And that was why the Orozco revolution failed.

When Carranza proclaimed himself "First Chief of the Revolution," on the death of Madero, he cleverly indorsed the principles of Madero as set forth in the plan of San Luis Potosi, but put all the emphasis upon the restoration of Constitutional Government in Mexico. Either because he was afraid that if he made promises he could not fulfill them any more than Madero could, or because he did not believe in the wholesale distribution of land to the peons, Carranza avoided the question entirely. He said that after

the Constitutionalist Government was established and order restored in the country he would see what could be done. Zapata promptly denounced him, his party and his plan, and declared that Carranza did not intend to make any radical changes, and it is perfectly true that the peons are only secondarily interested in the restoration of constitutional government.

#### WHY VILLA IS POPULAR

But Villa, with or without the approbation of his chief, went ahead confiscating the estates of the great landowners and dividing them among the people. For instance, in the State of Chihuahua he gave outright sixty-two and a half acres to every adult male, to be inalienable for ten years. He knew that many of them, especially the younger generation, were so sunk in lethargy because of the slavery of the haciendas as to have lost all feeling for individual proprietorship of their farms; he calculated that if they were not allowed to gamble away or sell their properties for ten years the ancient independent love of working the land would return. It is significant that Zapata promptly joined Villa, and is now in accord with him, although he still renounces Carranza.

The three years of the revolution have educated the Mexican people more than the thirty-five years of the great "Educator," Porfirio Diaz. For one thing, they have traveled all over the republic in the revolutionary army, a thing that never happened before, and now possess a very distinct national feeling. Villa's army is not composed entirely of Northerners. It contains

men from Yucatan, Jalisco, Zacatecas, Vera Cruz, and the Federal district itself.

The peon along the American border now knows every day what his comrades in Sinaloa and Aguas Calientes are thinking. Every State in the republic, either covertly or openly, is in revolt. Where there are telegraph lines the revolutionists communicate with Carranza daily; where that is impossible, weekly messengers ride north over the secret roads of the republic. The old barriers between communities are broken down; thought spreads, and every day more Mexicans join the revolution.

And there has also grown up, not only among the soldiers, but even among the women and old men in outlying villages and haciendas far removed from the lines of communication, the feeling and the desire for representative government. They have decided that they will be no longer ruled by jefe politicos or other Federal agents of the Palace in Mexico City—that they will be no longer policed by Federal soldiers and spies. Their common form of political society is communal and tribal. But now there is a pretty general realization that in order to protect themselves against the predatory rich and the Government they must have their own representatives in Congress. Of course, they are still very ignorant; hardly a village that has not elected its head man who, it believes, will be a member of the National Legislature. But the idea is at last thoroughly implanted in the peons—for the first time.

## IF WE OCCUPY MEXICO

We are going to destroy all that. We have made ourselves responsible for Mexico before the eyes of the world. The first American soldier who enters Mexico City means the end of the Mexican revolution. It means that the United States cannot leave Mexico until it has established there a Government perfectly suitable to the European powers, and that Government will not be suitable at all to the Mexican people. We must suppress the right of franchise in a way that even Porfirio Díaz never dared to do. For if the peons were to indicate their choice for President they would probably elect a man who represents them—perhaps even a peon like Francisco Villa. At any rate, some one who would give them what they have been fighting for so painfully and so long. And there is not a Government in the world which will allow that, because the people's choice for President will take the lands away from the rich who stole them, and return them to the people to whom they rightfully belong. And that, you know, is confiscation—a crime under the law.

The Government of the United States has already expressed itself as being opposed to the distribution of lands. Moreover, it would not dare, if it wanted to—which it doesn't—recognize such a man as Villa; in the first place, because he was a bandit and not respectable; in the second place, because he is only a peon, not a business man, and therefore impossible in the eyes of a democratic nation.

Of course, there are immense European and Amer-

ican interests in Mexico, many of them obtained by sheer bribery, all of them rich in the blood and sweat of the peons. The United States could not recognize any desire of the Mexicans that some of these illegal concessions be restored to the people who were cheated out of them. In Mexico, as well as at home, the idle money of foreign speculators is of more importance than the wishes, independence, and ideals of the people who gave it to them.

#### THE PEONS WILL FIGHT US

It is an Anglo-Saxon trait to consider all other races as inferior. A great many of us honestly believe that we will benefit the Mexicans by forcing our institutions upon them. We know nothing about the Latin temperament, and care less. We do not realize that the Latin ideal of liberty is broader than our own. We want to devitalize the Mexican race and turn them into brown, docile American business men and laborers, as we have the Cubans, as we are turning the Filipinos.

As I write this, some of our newspapers are publishing sickening headlines about the seventeen heroic American marines who laid down their lives for their country in the streets of Vera Cruz. The lowest estimate of the Mexican dead is 200. The greater number of those who died were not Mexican soldiers at all; they were Mexican citizens firing from the roofs of their own houses upon a foreign army which invaded their country because some foreign business men whom they had enriched were not satisfied and wanted it all.

Our efficient, highly organized Roman legions will not find the Mexican Army their most determined opponents. It is the peons and their wives, the ignorant, patient, generous race that has slept for 400 years and is now awake at last and struggling for liberty and self-consciousness, that they will have to shoot. It is the unorganized great mass of the people, without adequate arms or any knowledge of modern warfare—"the embattled farmers," like those who stood at Concord and Lexington—who will be murdered. They will take up their guns with reckless bravery and resist us desperately in the streets and at the doors of their houses. The revolution will be done for ever. And the United States will have quenched an awakening race that might one day have loomed great in the world's history.

And if we can ever withdraw from that distracted country we will leave things worse than they were before—an exploiting class firmly intrenched in the places of power, the foreign interests stronger, because we supported them, the great estates securely re-established, and the peons taught that wage slavery and not individual freedom is the desirable thing in life.

JOHN REID

New York, April 26, 1914 ,

